

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA
NORTHERN DIVISION

MICHAEL RUFFIN, #145 522,)
)
Plaintiff,)
)
v.) CIVIL ACTION NO. 2:19-CV-833-WHA
) [WO]
STATE OF ALABAMA, *et al.*,)
)
Defendants.)

RECOMMENDATION OF THE MAGISTRATE JUDGE

This 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action is pending before the court on a complaint filed by Michael Ruffin, an indigent inmate confined at the Fountain Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama. Plaintiff challenges an alleged use of excessive force on October 13, 2019, during his incarceration at the Staton Correctional Facility. Named as defendants are the State of Alabama and Correctional Officer Frazier. Upon review, the court concludes Plaintiff's complaint against the State of Alabama is due to be dismissed prior to service of process in accordance with the directives of 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.¹

I. DISCUSSION

A. The State Alabama

Plaintiff names as a defendant the State of Alabama. The law is settled that the State of Alabama is absolutely immune from suit. *Papasan v. Allain*, 478 U.S. 265 (1986) (unless the State of Alabama consents to suit or Congress rescinds its immunity, a plaintiff cannot proceed against

¹ The Prison Litigation Reform Act, as partially codified at 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, requires this court to screen complaints filed by prisoners against government officers or employees as early as possible in the litigation. The court must dismiss the complaint or any portion thereof that it finds frivolous, malicious, seeks monetary damages from a defendant immune from monetary relief, or which states no claim upon which relief can be granted. 28 U.S.C. §1915A(b)(1) & (2).

the State as the action is proscribed by the Eleventh Amendment and “[t]his bar exists whether the relief sought is legal or equitable.”).

“[T]he Eleventh Amendment prohibits federal courts from entertaining suits by private parties against States and their agencies [or employees].” *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 781, 98 S.Ct. 3057, 57 L.Ed.2d 1114 (1978). There are two exceptions to this prohibition: where the state has waived its immunity or where Congress has abrogated that immunity. *Virginia Office for Prot. & Advocacy v. Stewart*, 563 U.S. 247, 131 S.Ct. 1632, 1637–38, 179 L.Ed.2d 675 (2011). “A State’s consent to suit must be ‘unequivocally expressed’ in the text of [a] relevant statute.” *Sossamon v. Texas*, 563 U.S. 277, 131 S.Ct. 1651, 1658, 179 L.Ed.2d 700 (2011) (quoting *Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98, 104 S.Ct. 900, 79 L.Ed.2d 67 (1984)). “Waiver may not be implied.” *Id.* Likewise, “Congress’ intent to abrogate the States’ immunity from suit must be obvious from ‘a clear legislative statement.’” *Seminole Tribe of Fla. v. Florida*, 517 U.S. 44, 55, 116 S.Ct. 1114, 134 L.Ed.2d 252 (1996) (quoting *Blatchford v. Native Vill. of Noatak*, 501 U.S. 775, 786, 111 S.Ct. 2578, 115 L.Ed.2d 686 (1991)).

Selensky v. Alabama, 619 F. App’x 846, 848–49 (11th Cir. 2015). Thus, the State of Alabama may not be sued unless the State has waived its Eleventh Amendment immunity, *see Pennhurst State School & Hospital v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984), or Congress has abrogated the State’s immunity, *see Seminole Tribe v. Florida*, 517 U.S. 44, 59 (1996).

Neither waiver nor abrogation applies here. The Alabama Constitution states that “the State of Alabama shall never be made a defendant in any court of law or equity.” Ala. Const. art. I, § 14. The Supreme Court has recognized that this prohibits Alabama from waiving its immunity from suit. *Pugh*, 438 U.S. at 782, 98 S.Ct. 3057 (citing Ala. Const. art. I, § 14.)

Selensky, 619 F. App’x at 849. “Alabama has not waived its Eleventh Amendment immunity in § 1983 cases, nor has Congress abated it.” *Holmes v. Hale*, 701 F. App’x 751, 753 (11th Cir. 2017) (citing *Carr v. City of Florence*, Ala., 916 F.2d 1521, 1525 (11th Cir. 1990)). Consequently, any claims lodged against the State of Alabama are frivolous and are, therefore, due to be dismissed with prejudice under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1).

II. CONCLUSION

Accordingly, it is the Recommendation of the Magistrate Judge that:

1. Plaintiff's complaint against the State of Alabama be DISMISSED with prejudice under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1);
2. The State of Alabama be TERMINATED as party; and
3. This case be referred to the undersigned for additional proceedings.

It is

ORDERED that **on or before April 7, 2020**, Plaintiff may file an objection to the Recommendation. Plaintiff must specifically identify the factual findings and legal conclusions in the Recommendation to which each objection is made. Frivolous, conclusive, or general objections will not be considered by the court. Plaintiff is advised this Recommendation is not a final order and, therefore, it is not appealable.

Failure to file a written objection to the Magistrate Judge's findings and recommendations as required by the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) shall bar a *de novo* determination by the District Court of legal and factual issues covered in the Recommendation. The failure to file a written objection will also waive the right of Plaintiff to challenge on appeal the District Court's order based on unobjected-to factual and legal conclusions accepted or adopted by the District Court except upon grounds of plain error or manifest injustice. 11th Cir. R. 3-1; *see Resolution Trust Co. v. Hallmark Builders, Inc.*, 996 F.2d 1144, 1149 (11th Cir. 1993).

Done, this 24th day of March 2020.

/s/ Charles S. Coody
CHARLES S. COODY
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE